

The Tawny Lion Pawing To Get Free:  
A Study of Milton's Christology

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## Contents

Abbreviations	3
"The Tawny Lion Pawing To Get Free"	4
Notes	58
Bibliography	60



## Abbreviations

AL	<u>Artis Logicae</u> . Volume 11 of <u>The Works of John Milton</u> , Columbia edition.
Areop.	<u>Areopagitica</u> . Volume 2 of <u>Complete Prose Works</u> , pp. 485-570.
CD	<u>Christian Doctrine</u> , Book I. Volume 6 of <u>Complete Prose Works</u> , tr. by John Carey.
CD, Book II	<u>Christian Doctrine</u> , Book II. As above.
De Doc.	<u>De Doctrina Christiana</u> , Book I. Volumes 14-16 of <u>The Works of John Milton</u> . Latin text only. All English translations are mine.
Of Education	<u>Of Education</u> . Volume 2 of <u>Complete Prose Works</u> , pp. 361-415.
PL	<u>Paradise Lost</u> . Merritt Y. Hughes' edition.
Tetra.	<u>Tetrachordon</u> . Volume 2 of <u>Complete Prose Works</u> , pp. 577-718.

## The Tawny Lion Pawing To Get Free:

### A Study of Milton's Christology

In one of its many forms the central question on which John Milton's De Doctrina Christiana turns is that raised by Christ to his disciples when he asked them, "But whom say ye that I am?"

Note 1.

(Matt. 16:15). Although theology is the preoccupation of the present essay, the relationship between the theological and poetic answers is a complex, thorny, and interesting problem on which I intend to make occasional observations. Nor is the lengthy theological answer itself simple, since in order to formulate a Christology adequate to this primal question of identity, Milton reached back to the prior problem of the relation between the Son and the Father and forward through the life of the incarnate Word to the concerns of man with the heavenly Paraclete. Though the theological form would not have permitted the epic design I have just suggested, nevertheless it is of the first importance to keep in our minds the very real and immediate question asked by Christ to his followers while we attempt to follow the often labyrinthine path of Milton's argument. Such presence of mind is necessary in order to answer Arthur Barker's important question:

Barker, 168.

"How were the formulae of theology thus animated for him?"

CD, Epistle, 122.  
Note 2.

Milton called his work "my dearest and best possession." Though we may not cherish it that much, we do well to take it seriously, which means, among other things, that we must try

to conform ourselves as far as possible to his intended audience of "mature, strong-minded men who thoroughly understand the teaching of the Gospel." No skipping over those dense paragraphs of proof-texts is permitted, since they are at the heart and not the periphery of his work:

CD, Epistle, 122. Most authors who have dealt with this subject at the greatest length in the past have been in the habit of filling their pages almost entirely with expositions of their own ideas. They have relegated to the margin, with brief reference to chapter and verse, the scriptural texts upon which all that they teach is utterly dependent. I, on the other hand, have striven to cram my pages even to overflowing, with quotations drawn from all parts of the Bible and to leave as little space as possible for my own words, even when they arise from the putting together of actual scriptural texts.

As I intend to show from time to time, Milton used biblical quotations as subtle and powerful tools not so much to prove points as to make them. Everything that this theologian says about his treatise leads us back to its scriptural core and his scrupulous attention to it. The intimacy of this bond between the Bible and De Doctrina has some very profound and often ignored consequences.

CD, xxx, 580. Milton unambiguously sets out his view of the clarity and simplicity of scripture, "especially in matters of faith and holiness," wherein it is sufficient. The troublesome corruptions of the external document, which has strangely been entrusted to CD, xxx, 589. "wayward and uncertain guardians," are to be referred to the internal scripture "written in the hearts of the believers through

CD, XXVII, 521.  
CD, XXX, 588.

the Holy Spirit," which cannot be corrupted. The supreme internal authority is tested not only by Milton's uncompromising intellectual honesty, but also by his exegetical principle that "each passage of scripture has only a single sense," though that single sense may have different intensities of meaning or degrees of restriction, and he does allow the essential typology of Old Testament

CD, XXX, 581.

cp. MacCallum.

passages. These conservative limits he places on the use of types and the authority of metaphor in the theological context are not to be denied, but the intimacy of association which the parabolic language of scripture and the inherent ambiguity of the very words which scripture sanctions create a tension which both complicates the argument and gives it a tendency, impossible to actualize in this kind of expression, to return to the poetic form of the parable on which it so thoroughly depends. It is in this sense that I would like to suggest that De Doctrina is a working paper and not a complete and systematic theology, and in this way that the difficult relationship between the treatise and his great epic poem can be most fruitfully explored.

Our subject is, of course, Milton's Christology, but a more general position with regards to the whole work which surrounds it seems in order. That we view De Doctrina as incomplete does not presume that it is unfinished or not a unity, and so when difficulties arise in following the argument (the going does get rough), it is best to determine first if the problem does not lie in the nature of what Milton tried to do in the context

in which he tried to do it, rather than to presume a muddled inconsistency, the error of an amanuensis, or any other such shift.

So much for the internal difficulties. Almost as soon as the De Doctrina appeared from its obscurity in 1824, charges of heresy and theological obliquity began to obscure a critical understanding of the work, which confusion has unfortunately not been entirely outgrown. Especially persistent has been the charge that Milton

Cp. Tobin, 42 n. 1. was an Arian. Those who have thought so seem not to have paid close enough attention to what Milton said about heresy in his introductory Epistle:

For my own part, I devote my attention to the Holy Scriptures alone. I follow no other heresy or sect. I had not even studied any of the so-called heretical writers, when the blunders of those who are styled orthodox and their unthinking distortions of the sense of scripture, first taught me to agree with their opponents whenever these agreed with the Bible.

CD, Epistle, 123, my  
italics.

For Milton, without the total freedom "not only to sift and

winnow any doctrine, but also openly to give their opinions of

CD, Epistle, 122. it and even to write about it, according to what each believes,"

CD, Epistle, 123. men would have "no religion and no gospel" and would be enslaved

CD, Epistle, 123. "by human law, or rather, to be more exact, by an inhuman tyranny."

Those who would bestow the indivious titles of "heretic" to the

man or "heresy" to his work clearly represented for him the

irrational bigotry and anti-intellectualism of the enslaved mind.

The situation for us may be less polemical than it was for Milton, but the basic problem remains the same. The question of

whether or not Milton was an Arian is very uninteresting, and it obscures the far more significant one of how Milton recapitulated in his own development that which took place in the earliest centuries of Christianity, when the first few generations of Christians attempted to answer that question, "whom say ye that I am?" Milton and Arius seem similar in some ways because they are (both) related (quite) separately to the same process of working out in the "process of speech" the meaning of Christianity's pivotal event. I have found it useful, therefore, to examine briefly the theological history of this early period in an attempt to clarify the larger context of ideas into which the arguments of De Doctrina fit. Neither space nor time have permitted the necessary task to be performed, of relating Milton's theology so perceived to the theology of his time. His explicit intention of "restoring religion to something of its pure original state," his independence of "the belief and judgment of others," and his dissatisfaction with the dishonesty and prejudice he found in contemporary volumes of divinity, perhaps provide reasons to regard this omission with less severity.

PLVII, 168.

CD, Epistle, 117.

CD, Epistle, 118.

CD, Epistle, 119-20.

The starting point for an examination of Milton's Christology is that bulky chapter, "Of the Son of God," the importance of which is indicated by its having attached the only preface in the whole work, in which we are warned of the difficulty of the material and the potential for misunderstanding. Most of this chapter is taken up with the question of the relation between

the Son of God and God the Father. It is necessary, therefore, first to take a brief look at what Milton means by "God" in the prior chapter devoted to that subject.

CD, II, 133. The knowledge of God, Milton says, "must be understood in terms of man's limited powers of comprehension. God, as he really is, is far beyond man's imagination, let alone his understanding." God cannot directly be known; in other words, he cannot be objectified, except in dogmatics through an accommodation to finite human capacity provided by the image of God set up in scripture. For Milton, this image is to be taken exactly as found there: "God, then, has disclosed just such an idea of himself to our understanding as he wishes us to possess." CD, II, 136. Figurative interpretations of this "single sense" carry us "beyond the reach of human comprehension, and outside the written authority of scripture, into vague subtleties of speculation," in an attempt to reach a hidden meaning or esoteric doctrine. CD, II, 133-4. Milton steadfastly rejects that false kind of mystery and urges the reader to rest on the verbal images of scripture itself. MacCallum, 401-3. For the student of Christology, the importance of this mediating image, which consists principally of the divine attributes, is that it points toward the incarnate Son as man's sole means of reconciliation with or knowledge of God.

The attributes consist mostly of denials: immense, infinite, eternal, immutable, and incorruptible. Depth of meaning comes through the proof-texts which Milton cites. The first attribute is,

CD, II, 140.

"that he is the TRUE GOD;" in the biblical context, he is "the only true God" (John 17:3), which implies <sup>a</sup>the false god and suggests the anathema of polytheism with which any conception of a Christ separate from God but equally divine would have to answer. The second attribute is "that God in his most simple nature is a

CD, II, 140.

SPIRIT;" his proof-text defines spirit by what it is not: "a spirit does not have flesh and bones" (Luke 24:39), which, by its context, is to say, a spirit is that which cannot be crucified, implying the absolute necessity for the incarnate Christ to effect a reconciliation between God and the world. The other attributes of Milton's God, when viewed through cited scripture, continue to enlarge upon this image of an immense and infinite gulf between God and fallen man, of God's irresistible strength and man's inescapable weakness, of the endurance of the heavenly kingdom and the evanescence of any earthly monument, of the omnipresence of God and the guilt of shame-ridden man who would try to hide from him. All eight of the attributes showing God's nature come to summation in his unity, utter and complete, the importance of which continues to reverberate throughout Milton's discussion of the Son, in that a God who is one cannot share his essence with anyone. To that point we shall shortly return.

Note 3.

A good way to start an examination of Milton's Son of God is with the formidable set of theological terms which serve to explicate the relation of Father to Son. It is difficult to understand the significance of Milton's use of the terms, however,



without first acquiring some notion of how they were used in early Christian theology.

Pelikan, 175. According to Jaroslav Pelikan, this problem of "the relation of the divine in Christ to the divine in the Father" was not only historically prior to but more fundamental than "the relation of the divine in Christ to his earthly life." Pelikan cites earliest Christian literature and pagan observations contemporary to it to show that from the first Christ was regarded as a god, but that between the primitive belief and the doctrine of the Trinity and the dogma of the person of Christ, centuries of controversy intervened. This period of ferment is the age with which I find it useful to identify Milton's treatise.

Pelikan, 193-8. The chief Gnostic and pagan difficulty with early Christianity was a strikingly tenacious objection which crystallized around the teachings of Arius, that God had become a suffering man. Apparently, Schaff, s.v. "Arianism," the Arians solved this difficulty for themselves by defining Christ as a creature, severed from the divinity of an absolutely transcendent Godhead that did not share the principle of creation nor its ousia (being, essence) with anyone, including the "Son". This position was anathematized (and perhaps in part defined) at Constantine's Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325), which declared the Father and the Son to be homoousios (coessential). MacMullen, 159-79. In the Western Church, ousia was translated by Latin substantia (substance) and essentia (essence), so that at this early period Note 4. all three came to represent a shared essence of the Godhead,

in which the attributes of divinity inhere. The Greek term hypostasis (etymologically identical to sub-stantia) was identified at Nicaea with ousia, and hence in the West with substantia, but it quickly developed to represent that which differentiates the members of the Godhead, and was so translated by Latin persona (person).

M. Kelly, 140-1 n. 30.  
Hunter, "Further  
Definitions."

In the orthodox writings, therefore, it is usual to find the Godhead defined as consisting of one ousia, essentia, or substantia, and three hypostases or personae. As an example of such a trinitarian formula, the Athanasian Creed provides us with a useful means of illuminating Milton's theology by contrast:

Patrides, "Milton  
on the Trinity."

Now this is the Catholic faith, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity, without either confusing the persons or dividing the substance. For the Father's person is one, the Son's another, the Holy Spirit's another; but the Godhead of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is one, their glory is equal, their majesty coeternal.

J.N.D. Kelly, 17-18.

The Arian heresy is clearly implied by "dividing the substance" and elsewhere throughout the Creed; historically this heresy, together with similar theological positions, has become known as "Subordinationism" (the Son being subordinated to the Father). The other heresy alluded to here, in the phrase "confusing the persons," is the polar opposite of Arianism, known as Sabellianism or, more generally, "Monarchism," in which the distinctions are either weak or dissolved entirely. Though the orthodox Athanasian statement appears to be equidistant from the two extremes, it is

Hamell, s.v.  
Note 5.

Hamell, s.v.

JND Kelly, 76-80. quite clear which heresy was more troublesome. If we return to the theological terminology, we can see that the orthodox Godhead of one substance or essence undivided, in which the attributes of divinity inhere, and three persons however unconfused, is far more a monarchy than a hierarchy. What is essential about this Godhead is what is shared among the three persons, not what makes each distinct. The persistence of this monarchian strain throughout Christian doctrine is reflected historically in the fact that "men have frequently been condemned for denying the deity of Christ but rarely for denying distinction between the Father and the Son. To deny the former has generally seemed unchristian; to deny the latter only unintelligent."

McGiffert, in  
Pelikan, 182.

Though Milton recognized and defined each of the three persons of the orthodox creed, the term "trinity," because of its bias, must be avoided in any discussion of Milton's Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. First of all, as he points out, the scriptural basis for this doctrine is very weak indeed. Furthermore, scripture is quite unspecific about the nature of the Holy Spirit, which ghostly being, he concludes, is "a minister of God, and therefore a creature" inferior to the Son, who is not a creature; "the brightness of God's glory and the image of his divine subsistence are said to have been impressed on the Son but not on the Holy Spirit." For present purposes as well as for De Doctrina as a whole, the crucial relationship is between the Father and the Son, and on that structure

CD, V, 221;  
CD, VI, 297-8.

CD, VI, 298.

depends Milton's conception of the Incarnation and hence of the mediatorial ministry of Christ.

J.N.D. Kelly, 74. The Athanasian position asserts that "while the Godhead has three persons, i.e. three forms of presentation, it is one and the same Godhead which is exhibited in each, the divine substance or essence being absolutely indivisible." For Milton, however, substance and essence are not synonymous; he assigns essence to a principle of individuation or hypostasis rather than equating it with a common substrate. Milton's God is essentially his unique hypostasis: "it is quite impossible for any entity to share its essence with anything else whatsoever, for it is by virtue of its essence that it is what it is, and is distinguished numerically from everything else." "God is one being, not two. One being has one essence." In the Artis Logicae, Milton argues that,

CD, V, 225.

CD, V, 212.

AL I, vii, 59. number, as Scaliger rightly says, is an affection following an essence. Therefore, things which differ in number also differ in essence; and never do they differ in number if not in essence.--Here let the theologians awake.

CD, II, 146. What the theologians must awake to is what Milton means by that focal attribute of God, that he is ONE. Here the theologian echoes Christ's prime commandment: "Hear, Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord" (Mark 12:29, from Deut. 6:4). Now, the meaning of "one" depends radically on the context. For Milton's theology, "one" has its divine significance. The Godhead cannot contain more than one hypostasis because God cannot be objectified,

CD, II, 148.



hypostasis, substance, and his real being, termed his  
subsistentia (subsistence) or his substantial essence. The one  
 hypostasis of the Father, the "most perfect essence by which God  
 exists from himself, in himself, and through himself," is "not the  
 thing (ens) itself, but the essence of the thing in the abstract."  
 Nevertheless, since the divine essence is "utterly complete" and  
 simple (simplex), "neither substance nor subsistence can add  
 anything" to it; that is, hypostasis, substance, and subsistence  
 cannot be treated as objective components of some divine  
 structure. It is in this sense that we are to consider Milton's  
 subsequent identification of the hypostasis with the subsistence  
 or whole being of the Father. The consistency or inconsistency of  
 Milton's usage is not really the point; we need to follow with  
 some understanding his attempts to break down the objective  
 associations of the inherited terms. What does seem quite clear  
 is his point that the Father's hypostatic essence is not something  
 separable from his whole being, as a mask is from a masker.

As was just hinted, Milton rejects the theological terms  
 "person" and "personality," though the force of common usage  
 makes them quite difficult to avoid entirely. Persona remains  
 for him a theatrical term, which he uses cautiously to mean  
 "any one individual being," and it would seem that his strong  
 etymological sense of "person" reacted against an image he could  
 not accept: a conception of the Father and Son as masks (personae)  
 through which a behind-the-scenes and thus impersonalized

divine force sounds (personat). As Paradise Lost shows, any tendency to turn God into an impersonal numen is spiritually perilous. "Accordingly let no one expect me to...bring into my argument all that play-acting of the persons of the godhead."

CD, V, 213.

Substance, the essential stuff of the Athanasian trinity, gets very little specific treatment in De Doctrina. We are told that it cannot add anything to God's perfect essence and that out of it God produced the Son and the Holy Spirit. God "was in a real sense Father of the Son, whom he made of his own substance." Not much else is said about it, and since it is a technical term of theology, we must be very cautious about going outside De Doctrina for help, for example, to the "Ethereal substance" out of which the angels are made in Paradise Lost. As we have seen, any attempt to objectify what appear to be components of the Godhead has demonic roots, so perhaps the incident of a Satanic ploy in that poem can be helpful. During the war in Heaven, the devils make gunpowder out of the "materials dark and crude" beneath the bright surface of Heaven's ground, where God's intelligential ray informs the dark "originals of Nature" and makes them "beauteous, op'ning to the ambient light"--an analogy, perhaps, to the relationship between God's hypostatic essence and his substance, which that essence informs. Thus Satan's objectification of the heavenly stuff turns it into crude and dark material of warfare, just as his apostasy from his own creative principle darkens and stupefies his mind. The substance of God,

CD, V, 209; 211.

PLVI, 330.

PLVI, 469-512.

therefore, is intelligible insofar as it is both subject and object at once.

Milton uses these troublesome terms to make explicit the ways in which the unity of his God excludes the trinitarian amalgamation of Christ into the Godhead. To show in what sense the Son of God is God proves to be a much more difficult affair than to establish their hypostatic difference, because of the generic limitations of Milton's theological language. To identify Father and Son, who are different, requires the language of metaphor, which the theologian struggles to avoid except insofar as the intimate bond with scripture and its inherently ambiguous expressions *and metaphor* forces him to use it.

Take the radically patriarchial (i.e. motherless) father-son metaphor as an example. Because the Son is explicitly called the Son of God, he must at some time have been actually produced by the Father, be of an essence distinct from the Father's, and thus be subordinate to the Father. What requires attention here is the characteristic pattern of Milton's thinking, which requires that the theological metaphor be grounded in some actuality. This sense of a kernel of each scriptural metaphor we might attribute to a "literal" reading of the text, though the Latin word which Milton uses, proprius (restricted, proper), is more accurate, as he restricts his expressions as much as he can to their historical origins. As Paradise Lost shows, there is a heavenly as well as an earthly history.



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Thus the reference to the birth of the Son in Psalm 2

CD, V, 206.

("You are my Son, I have begotten you today") clearly requires a

restricted sense prior to its metaphorical outgrowths. First the

Son was produced, thereafter begotten in the sense of being exalted

CD, V, 205.

by the Father. This production of the Son as a separate substantial

essence was chief among the External Efficiencies of the Father,

prior to both creation and government of the universe, as it

was the first of the Internal Efficiencies by which the Son's

CD, V, 205.

existence was decreed.

For Milton, "the generation of the divine nature is by no

one more sublimely or more fully explained than by the apostle

CD, V, 211.

to the Hebrews, i.2,3." Given the central importance he places

on this text, we will examine Milton's conception of the Son

by means of it. Here, then, is Milton's version of the text,

to which is added the immediately foregoing and crucial clause

out of the Authorized Version:

[God...has in these last days spoken to us  
through his own Son,] whom he has appointed heir  
of all things, through whom also he made the  
world. Who, since he is the effulgence  
(effulgentia) of his glory and the impressed  
image (character) of his subsistence, &c.

DeDoc. V, 192.

The production of the Son is figured here through the two

metaphors of the blazing forth of light and the stamped or

impressed image (Gk. charakter). Milton returns to this passage

later to emphasize the scriptural sanction of it; he comments,

"What can this imply but that God imparted to his Son as much

as he wished of the divine nature, and indeed of the divine substance also?" Earlier he points out that this "divine nature" is not the divine essence but image, as in II Pet. 1:4 ("that you might be made sharers of the divine nature"); God's essence cannot be shared. The metaphors of Heb. 1:1-3 are not developed any further in the theology, as they are in Paradise Lost, where the effulgentia gloriae is used with great power in the proem of Book III: on the Son "impresst the effulgence of his Glorie abides." It is important to note that in De Doctrina Milton does not identify the Son with that effulgence but says that it was impressed on him.

Because of the scriptural sanction of the metaphor of the first born Son, it follows that "the production of Christ was apparently a kind of 'birth' or creation." The heavenly birth of Christ in time has also an attractive symmetry to it, in strict accord with that powerfully condensed statement of analogical thought in the Lord's Prayer, "on earth as it is in Heaven." For Milton, this analogy has the advantage of directing attention away from the cosmological toward the historical event and of bringing earth and heaven into a closer relationship, as Raphael suggests. Milton speaks elsewhere of the body of Truth as homogeneous and proportional; the golden rule of theology is thus "to be still searching what we know not, by what we know." Similarly, the use of analogy appears in Romans 1:20, which Milton cites to show the kinds of things we can

CD, V, 211.

PL III, 388.

CD VII, 303.

PL V, 475-6.

Areop., 551.

know by analogy, God's essence standing outside that analogical bridge just as he stands outside time and space; the Son, however, is within reach of analogy. "The Son of God was the first born of all created things in the same sense as the Son of Man was the πρωτότοκος or first born of Mary" (Matt. 1:25).

The metaphor of the first born son (primogenitus) is implicit in Heb. 1:2 (Christ as "heir of all things") as well as in six proof-texts Milton cites to show that "the possibility of his being co-essential with the Father and of his generation from eternity" is excluded. For the moment I wish to stick with the birth metaphor in the restricted sense. As Christ is said to be "the first born of all created things" in Col. 1:15 and "the beginning of God's creation" in Rev. 3:14, it is clear to Milton that "he was the first of the things which God created," suggesting strongly a part of a collective whole. (Isolated from its context within Milton's argument this suggestion could be misleading.) It should be noted that the metaphor of the first born son, however strictly taken, brings with it the biblical associations of the eldest male child whose primogeniture includes inheritance of the father's potent blessing and his property (cp. Jacob and Esau), with the strong metaphorical sense that this first born son is the father, that is, the father, after death, lives in him or acts through him. Again, Milton's argument is in perfect accord with a strict application of the Father-Son figure. The reference to Jacob and Esau will further

suggest the biblical theme of the passed-over eldest son, to which we will return shortly.

Several references have already been made to Milton's objection to the doctrine of eternal birth. First of all, he can find no proof for such a notion: "not a scrap of real evidence for the eternal generation of the Son can be found in the whole of scripture." John 1:1 and other passages demonstrate "that the Son existed before the creation of the world, but not that his generation was from eternity." Furthermore, since there is "no reason why we should conform to the popular belief that motion and time, which is the measure of motion, could not, according to our concepts of 'before' and 'after,' have existed before

this world was made," the phrase "in the beginning" (in principio) can for Milton be rendered, "in the time of beginnings," which sense Milton understands as a different mode of time, not as a timeless state. The way is thus left open (what theology only permits poetry may realize) for a conception of different rhythms of time, as in the poetry, and by that word "rhythm" a connection with the metaphor of music is revealed, as in the "melodious time" of the Nativity Ode. There will be occasion to return to this extra-theological development. Milton as theologian does touch on this idea briefly when he comments that the word "today" in Psalm 2, for example, makes clear that the begetting of the Son "took place within the bounds of time," i.e. that "today" is fruitfully ambiguous: in its original and restricted

CDV,206.

CDXVI,442.

CDXV,430-1.

significance it refers to the Son's production, and with the sanction of scripture, in its metaphorical senses to the Son's appointment as mediator and Christ's exaltation, which includes his resurrection, ascension, and glorification before the angels. The ambiguity in "today" remains a kind of test of the hearer's perception of time's rhythms or modes. Furthermore, it seems clear from Milton's proof texts marshalled to define the Father's choice of the Son for the mediatorial office that this election occurred at some time before the Incarnation. Out of this matrix of possibilities, then, Milton as poet made the story of the testing of the angels in Paradise Lost V, wherein Satan fails to grasp the metaphor and the perception of time which lies behind it. Again, in the theology, we note that Milton requires the ambiguities of metaphor to be grounded in an event of heavenly history.

CDV,209.

Closely connected with the idea of the Son's generation in time by a Father who exists timelessly (the first of several discontinuous moments of epiphany) is Milton's doctrine that this external manifestation of God's decree is a free act: "generation has nothing to do with the essence of deity....he could not have begotten the Son except of his own free will and as a result of his own decree." Similarly, the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son is linked to the notion of natural necessity. In the words of a modern theologian, the orthodox trinitarian view specifies that,

The generation of the Son is a necessary act of God. Some of the early church fathers taught that it was an act determined by divine volition and therefore free; but this would make the existence of the Son contingent and thus rob Him of his divinity. Then the Son would not be equal to and homousios with the Father, for the Father exists necessarily, and cannot be conceived as non-existent. The generation of the Son must be regarded as a necessary and (perfectly natural) act of God. *nature*

iBerkhof, 208 n. 18.

Again, what Milton means by essence (ousia) is central to his argument; by his essence the Father is what he is and is therefore distinct from the Son. In this Miltonic sense Father and Son could be equal, "for equality cannot exist except between two or more essences." What Milton is objecting to is a non-metaphorical identification of Father and Son, and so by "equal" Milton means a kind of metaphorical identity tempered by the theological context. It goes almost without saying that Milton has no intention of robbing Christ of his divinity, but of showing the source and nature of his divine attributes:

CD, V, 275.

Since he received all these things from the Father, and was in the form of God, he did not reckon it robbery to be equal with God, Philipp. ii. 6, that is, because he had received it as a gift, not by robbery.

CD, V, 274.

The opposition of orthodox and Miltonic views exists not only in the definitions of essence but also in what those definitions imply. The strong impression one gets of the remoteness of the orthodox Son in contrast to the closeness of Milton's Mediator is profoundly significant, as will emerge in our examination

of the Incarnation.

CD, II, 143.

Milton's God is eternal, without beginning or end, outside time altogether, hypostatically unbegotten. Taking the metaphor of the Son in the restricted sense, as referring to one who has been begotten at some time, Milton holds that eternal generation and the Son are mutually exclusive concepts. Assuming an eternally generated Son won't work either, for then, being a Son, he would have had to have been in the Father and proceeded out from him, thereby becoming hypostatically mutable. What Milton appears to be rejecting here is a tendency toward the dissolution of the essential nature of the Son back into a remote Godhead.

CD VII, 313.

Other consequences follow from the absence of proof for the eternal birth of the Son and against antemundane time. "Indeed it seems likely that the apostasy, as a result of which so many myriads of [the angels] fled, beaten, to the lowest part of heaven, took place before even the first beginnings of this world." The repercussions of this possibility in Paradise Lost do not need explication, except to note the analogical symmetry with the Fall of man which it makes possible. The theology in a sense leaves room for the later symbolic vision. *son's point*

The metaphor of generation, as noted earlier, is also applied by scripture to the exaltation of the Son above the angels as king, so that generation, anointing, and election are identified. The central texts here are Psalm 2:6-7  
( "anointing my king, I have set him upon my holy hill of Sion....



You are my Son, I have begotten you today") and Hebrews 1:2,4 ("whom he has appointed heir of all things...being made more eminent than the angels by far, by so much as his allotted name is more excellent than theirs"). Milton notes that the name "Christ" (Gk. christos) is derived from this process of anointing, the symbolism of which resonates through the Bible in images of potency and vitality that the infusion of spiritual seed would suggest. Not much more is made of this theologically than to notice that "God begot the Son in the sense of making him king," though the intimacy between De Doctrina and scripture keeps the biblical symbolism with its resonances close at hand. In the poetic environment of Paradise Lost the theological kernels of God's eternal essence, the appointment to primogeniture, and the suggestion, noted earlier, of different rhythms of time, combine and expand into the first epiphany of Christ before the angels. The biblical theme of the passed-over eldest son (Satan in Paradise Lost) becomes inevitably involved, and is associated in De Doctrina as well as elsewhere in Milton's work with his "vertical" perspective, expressing the necessity of the finite mind to be open to the Infinite Mind, which "bloweth where it listeth;" "what created mind can comprehend...the wisdom infinite?" whose free act of grace is not constrained to choose an Esau, however deserving by the standards of the flesh, but comes upon Jacob, child of promise, whose deceit is wisdom by the standards of the spirit.

De Doc., v, 184.

CD, v, 207.

PL III, 705-6.

Cf. CD. iv, 196-7,  
CD Book II, XIII, 763.

Similarly, the thought-seed carried in De Doctrina by the scriptural sanction for the metaphor of anointment assimilates various resonant biblical passages into the poetic parable of Christ's commission by God before his victorious entry into the heavenly war, and his second epiphany, after the devils' rout, in Paradise Lost. The density of the poetry defies full explication here, but we may note in passing that the exaltation of the Son before battle is an infusing of virtue and grace in the forms of the water of life, the oil of gladness, and the quickening light; that the Son thus informed is the quick and piercing sword of God's Word; that the purgation of evil and the creative act which follows it each reflect the other; and that the Son's triumphal second epiphany is the prototype of the way that leads from Christ's entry into Jerusalem on Palm (Tree of Life) Sunday, through the cross, and to the apocalyptic marriage at the world's end.

The remaining metaphors of exaltation require us first to look into the Incarnation as it is delineated in De Doctrina, but before that is possible, we must return again to the controlling text, Heb. 1, where God is said to have "spoken to us through his Son...through whom also he made the world." The Son, in other words, is the Word of God.

One of the curiosities of Milton's scriptural text is the translation of the Greek logos by Latin sermo rather than, as in the Vulgate, verbum. The principal example is, of course,

PLVI, 680-718.

PLVI, 880-92.

John 1:1: "In principio erat Sermo et Sermo ille erat apud Deum, eratque ille Sermo Deus, &c." Milton is not rigorously consistent in this usage; he writes that, "Filium, verbi sive Sermonis sub nomine, in principio extitisse" (though the immediately following quotation is John 1:1, which uses sermo), and he uses verbum in a few other places as well. Nevertheless, it seems quite clear that Milton preferred sermo. Quoting II Peter 3:5, "per Dei sermonem," he comments, "id est, ut aliis in locis docetur, per filium, qui hinc, ut videtur, sermo dicitur." The direct use of logos (trusting to the Columbia index) occurs only once, and that by way of reply to a quotation of Zanchius, in a highly unfavorable context.

The substitution of sermo for verbum had, of course, been popularized in the Renaissance by Erasmus' critical edition of the New Testament, from which that editor also removed the spurious "Trinitarian phrase" found in the Authorized Version as I John 5:7. Through Mediaeval ecclesiastical tradition, verbum had apparently taken on "all the overtones of consubstantiality with the Father," a trinitarian association opposed by Erasmus, Milton, and others. Furthermore, Marsilio Ficino's earlier use of sermo, from which Erasmus' is derived, had already begun to weaken "the whole traditional conception of Christ as the Eternal Word (Logos, Verbum) in a philosophical sense as the Mind and Instrument of God." This change "would inevitable render philosophically difficult the traditional

Williams, 25. conception of the Logos-Son as consubstantial with the Father," where in Milton's terms coessentiality is meant. It seems that, as with Milton, a suspicion of "entertaining a lower view of Christ's person" hung about Ficino and Erasmus.

Bainton, 11.

Whatever the source, sermo as the audible Word fits well into Milton's conception of the Father and Son: "for the Word (Sermo) is both Son and Christ...and as he is the image, as it were, by which God becomes visible, so he is the Word (Sermo) by which God is audible. Since this is what he is like, he cannot be one in essence with an invisible and inaudible God." Now Milton's Christ is the agent of creation: "CREATION is the act by which GOD THE FATHER PRODUCED EVERYTHING THAT EXISTS BY HIS WORD AND SPIRIT (verbo et spiritu suo) , that is, BY HIS WILL." In amplifying what he means by verbo through biblical proof-texts, Milton correlates the great creative command in Genesis 1 with the Word of John 1, and the prophetic voice of the Old Testament Psalms with the apostolic word of the New Testament, thus manifesting the typological structure of the Bible which Milton took for granted. Here he may have been deliberate about the use of verbum in Old Testament quotations and sermo in New Testament ones; what seems likely is that whatever the word, he intends the force of sermo, a usage fully justified by early patristic sources, as we will see. In any event, the symmetry which Milton illuminates metaphorically identifies the command of creation, the Old Testament prophetic

CD, VII, 297.

CD, VII, 300.

voice, the incarnate Word, and the New Testament voice of revelation.

Milton's independence of human tradition is well known, but in the case of sermo he may well have found in early christological debate more to interest him than in the Renaissance example of Erasmus. Whether or not that kind of influence took place, it is important to allow the early usage of sermo to cast light upon Milton's work. Sermo as a translation for logos appears in some of the earliest Latin versions of the New Testament, and there is evidence that logos itself was used with the sense of sermo.

The Latin word, connoting the active process of speech rather than the thing spoken or contemplated, indicates "the presence in Christian teaching of a doctrine of the Logos not primarily determined by Greek cosmological speculation." The speculative tradition had given rise to a philosophical conception of the Logos as a cosmological principle, or indwelling reason in the mind of God, whereas the idea manifested in sermo emphasized "the continuity between Christ as the Logos and the speaking of God in the Old Testament prophets," to the Word as the divine agent of creation and revelation, or spoken word proceeding out from God. Because of the usefulness of the cosmological Logos to the early Christian apologists in their attempts to derive prior pagan wisdom from the more recent Christian source, this sense of the Word as cosmic principle prevailed in the secondary literature and became lodged in the Vulgate's verbum.

What we might call the active sermo as opposed to the

contemplative verbum manifest two contrasting imaginative states. The latter has its apparent biblical source in the basis "for the fullest statement of the Christian doctrine of the divine in Christ as Logos," which is not the obvious passage from John 1 but the Septuagint version of Proverbs 8:22-31. Both orthodox and Arian theologians identified Christ with the voice of this passage; the former read it as dealing with the relation between an eternally preexistent Logos and the Father, but in that relationship the latter detected a subordination of the Son as creature to his Fatherly creator, so distinct that this passage became the central text of Arianism. Thus both by direct influence and by reaction, Proverbs 8 decisively shaped the doctrine of the Trinity, which thereby took on the characteristics of the imaginative state inherited from the cosmological Logos.

*TPelikan, 186.*

*TPelikan, 61.*

*TPelikan, 195-6.*

*TPelikan, 61.*

By rejecting the identification of Christ with Proverbs 8, Milton reveals an important aspect of his stand relative to both orthodoxy and Arianism. "As for the eighth chapter of Proverbs," he comments in De Doctrina, "I should say that the figure introduced is not the Son of God but a poetical personification of Wisdom," and then, by citing Job 28:20-27, he specifies the nature of this figure. Job 28 establishes Wisdom in relation to God as natural treasure is in relation to man, thus showing Wisdom to be symbolically female, a creaturely Daughter of God, or God's bride at creation, not to be confused with the symbolically male Son who is, in fact, the Bridegroom. Milton's rejection

*CCD, VII, 304.*

of what he considered a false identity for Christ is also connected with Christ's rejection of pagan wisdom in Paradise Regained IV. Christ holds fast to his developing identity as the Son of God and spurns the demonic vocation to a spiritually passive role as pagan contemplative philosopher "led by Nature's light." He is being tempted, to paraphrase St. Augustine liberally, to turn his back to the true heavenly light and worship Sophia thus degraded into demonic whoredom.

Conf. IV, xvi, 56.

The crucial metaphor of the quick and piercing Sermo, which we have seen in its fourfold biblical form, expanded in Milton's poetry into the complex metaphor of music, by which poetry, philosophical harmony, and disciplined energy are also meant. When applied to God, the musical metaphor thus fits his central activity of creation, which is a purging and redemption, whether of the cosmos or the human mind. When applied to man, this music of enlightenment fits his answering task of purging away "the rustick harshnesse and distemper'd passions" of his own fallen intellect. The highest aim of human art, then, is that of the singer's voice in Ad Leonoram, agent of spiritual perfection, justifying the music of God to man:

TFrye, 47-50.

OF Education, 411.

serpit agens, facilisque docet mortalia corda  
sensim immortalis assuescere posse sono.

ll. 7-8.

Similarly, Plato identifies this spiritual end in the Muses' gift of intelligible harmony to man, "to assist the soul's interior revolution, to restore it to order and concord with itself," thus recreating man's original nature. The classical

Timaeus 47de, 90d.

embodiments of this regenerative power were for Milton the poet-musician Orpheus and the god Apollo, both conventionally types of Christ. In Orpheus' musical word (and not in the music itself) lay the restoration of the Age of Gold; in Apollo are identified the metaphors of light, music, poetry, and medicine: power over darkness, cacophonous stupidity, and death.

Thus the descent of the Word into the flesh is metaphorically musical, as in the Nativity Ode, which Arthur Barker has claimed as Milton's celebration of his own sudden enlightenment. In that poem, one gets the ravishing resonance of nature with the cosmic harmony, whose becoming audible identifies the creation and the Incarnation, both of which involve a redemption or movement upward on the chain of being by the infusion of a "vital virtue" and a purgation of the "black tartareous cold infernal dregs / Adverse to life," whether these latter be the stuff of chaos, the oracular idols of classical belief, or the subsequent dregs of idolatrous thought. The effect of the Word as the restoration or enlightenment of the intellect is important to Milton's Christology, as we will shortly discover.

"There are two parts to Christ's incarnation," Milton wrote in De Doctrina, "the conception and the nativity," but aside from his discussion of the Holy Spirit (efficient cause of the conception) as "the power and spirit of the Father himself" and not a separate person, Milton shows very little interest in either conception or nativity and most certain scorn



for a philosophical curiosity about the mechanics of the mystery, concluding that "it is best for us to be ignorant of things which God wishes to remain secret." The same conspicuous lack of attention to the infancy of the sermo infans in the Nativity Ode seems also to be due to a "wise ignorance" on matters quite beside the point.

Neither does the conception turn up in Milton's two senses of "begotten:" "one literal (proprie), with reference to production; the other metaphorical, with reference to exaltation." It would seem that by denying the eternal generation of the Son and asserting his origin in "a kind of 'birth' or creation" in time, Milton has effectively given us a Christ born in heaven but incarnated on earth. The Incarnation is the mystery; how it happened is unimportant.

Milton's usual antipathy to mysteries (such as the conception or the Trinity) is revealed here to be a rejection of the false constructs of human ingenuity and not the true mystery of faith which he celebrates in the Incarnation: "the mystery of godliness (pietatis mysterium) is unquestionably great, God was made manifest in the flesh" (I Tim. 3:16). Now pietas is the quality of one who is pius towards this mystery, in which "are all the treasures of wisdom" (Col. 2:3). Through the scriptural voice of Paul, Milton appears to be saying that the revealed mystery of God in Christ is the gate of wisdom and self-realization, so that we might equate the theologian's attitude here with that of the poet's Abdiel, prototype of the Christian hero, in the

debate with Satan. Indeed, Abdiel's sect can be identified through another proof text with the "communis mysterii--in Deo" (Eph. 3:9), that pius communis created through "the riches of this glorious mystery, which is Christ" (Col. 1:26-7). Once again we have a demonstration of the potential density of scriptural language realized in Milton's structure of proof texts.

The purpose of the Incarnation is the redemption of man, "that act by which Christ, sent in the fulness of time, redeemed all believers at the price of his own blood." As before, in the question of the relation of the Son to the Father, so here also Milton is very interested in the nature of Christ. As Redeemer, Christ has a dual nature which the theologian explores first in a structure of biblical texts, then through a definition of terms. The pattern of his scriptural quotations is an alternation of reflections on the Son of God ("he who comes from above: who comes from heaven," John 3:31) and the Son of Man ("from David's loins, insofar as the flesh is concerned," Acts 2:30), a circling around the two unmitigated aspects of the incarnate God-Man in their various scriptural facets. The structure of texts is concluded with Paul's image of the resurrected Christ, "the whole fulness of the godhead dwells in him bodily" (Col. 2:9), which Milton interprets within the framework of his discussion of the Son, "that the entire fulfilment of the Father's promises resides in, but is not hypostatically united with Christ as a man." Similarly, I Tim. 3:16 ("God made manifest in flesh") means

CD, XIV, 415.

CD, XIV, 419.

CD, XIV, 419.

"in his incarnate Son, his image."

An understanding of the Incarnation and its relation to the life and death of Christ clearly depends on a prior formulation of the relation between the Son and the Father, which point Milton later makes quite explicit:

the opinion I have advanced here about the hypostatic union [of the two natures of Christ] corroborates further the conclusion of my more lengthy discussion of the Son of God... (i.e. that the essence of the Son is not the same as the essence of the Father). For if it were the same the Son could not have coalesced in one person with man, unless the Father had also been included in the same union--unless, in fact, man had become one person with the Father as well as with the Son, which is impossible.

CD, XIV, 424-5.

Both in the De Doctrina and in the history of Christian doctrine, the trinitarian question preceded and shaped the subsequent development of Christology, so that in Milton's "impossible" lies a rejection of virtually all christological speculation within the post-Nicene Church, for which "the content of the divine [the Nicene ousia] as revealed in Christ was itself regulated by the axiomatically-given definition of the deity of God." Milton's decisive independence from traditional christologies must therefore be kept in mind throughout our examination of the nature and offices of Christ, whatever the superficial resemblances to orthodox formulas.

Pelikan, 229.

Nevertheless, it is helpful first to set out very briefly the positions of earliest christological debate. Beginning from the premise of a Son homoousios with the Father, two kinds

of Christology developed: that of the "hypostatic union" and that of the "indwelling Logos," to which the name of Nestorius is attached. This latter kind was based on "an interpretation of the relation between the divine and the human in Jesus Christ that sought to preserve the distinction between them by describing their union as the indwelling of the Logos in a man whom he had assumed," neither a union according to essence nor according to nature, but a kind of juxtaposition unique to the Incarnation, the precise nature of which seems unclear. Its religious intent, however, is obvious: "to take seriously the fact of moral development in the man Christ Jesus and thus to guarantee his status as simultaneously Redeemer and example," without involving "the divine in the suffering of the cross." A typical proof text of this position is Col. 2:9 ("In him the fulness of the deity dwells bodily"), and one of the cruces I Cor. 2:8 ("they crucified the Lord of Glory"). It is interesting to note that Milton shared the religious intent of the "indwelling Logos" theology and to observe in what follows how he fulfilled it.

The "hypostatic union" theology received its blessing (as Nestorius his condemnation) in the reaffirmation of the Nicene Creed as a christological formula at Ephesus in 431. Its starting point was apparently John 1:14 ("And the Word became flesh"), out of which arose two problems: the precise relation between the Word and the flesh, and the word "became" itself, as the Word was axiomatically immutable. To the latter recurrent

Pelikan, 251-2.

Pelikan, 253.

Pelikan, 253.

Pelikan, 254.

Pelikan, 260.

enigma Milton consistently applies "wise ignorance." This Christology ran into trouble with biblical passages showing growth and development, such as Luke 2:52 ("And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature"), since its overriding concern was for the indivisible unity of the incarnate Son (another concern Milton shared). The problem of the union was taken up by the Council of Chalcedon in 451, which formulated a doctrine of two distinct, unconfused

Hunter, "Milton on the Incarnation," 132. natures concurring in the person and hypostasis of Christ. This formula became general dogma and is the ancestor of what Milton calls "the orthodox position."

De Doc. XIV, 264-6. His version of the "hypostatic union" orthodoxy states that "two natures are so constituted in the one person of Christ, that the true and perfect one subsists without his own subsistence in the other nature," which means that the hypostasis (or person) and nature of the Word took on human nature without a human hypostasis, i.e. "it assumed human nature, but not manhood." Hooker CD, XIV, 422. makes plain the consequences of this structure for Anglican orthodoxy:

It pleased not the Word or wisdom of God to take to itself some one person amongst men, for then should that one have been advanced which was assumed and no more, but Wisdom to the end she might save many built her house of that nature which is common unto all, she made not this or that man her habitation, but dwelt in us.

Hooker, V, lii, 3.

What follows, then, is a kind of transformation of human nature independent of the achievement of any one man. For Milton,

CD, XIV, 422. however, human nature is a logical abstraction, "the form of man contained in the flesh" that must "at the very moment when it comes into existence, bring a man into existence too, and a whole man, with no part of his essence or his subsistence...or his personality missing." The orthodox position, therefore, is to him plainly absurd.

CD, XIV, 423-4. The structure of Milton's incarnate Son is impossible to conceive satisfactorily in objective terms. Again, the theologians' use of terms becomes difficult to follow, as he works to break down the subject-object gulf between man and God, in imitation of the union perfectly realized in the Incarnation itself: "the mutual hypostatic union of two natures or, in other words, of two essences, of two substances, and consequently of two persons," whose properties remain "individually distinct," although the union produces "one Christ, one ens, and one person." Milton resolutely and on principle refuses to be any more specific. He does say, however, that this difficult conception is summed up most fitly (aptissime) by the Greek word *Θεάνθρωπος*, not "God and Man" or "God-Man," which are both, in the words of Dr. Johnson, expressions of "the most heterogeneous ideas...yoked by violence together," but *Θεάνθρωπος*, one seamless being who is both one and two. Once again, Milton must move into metaphor to catch the image.

Johnson, 14.

Hunter, "Milton on the Incarnation," 138-42. William B. Hunter has suggested that one way to get close to what Milton meant by this union is to consider other images of union in Milton's work, the closest of which would seem to be the

Tetra., 606.

"true beseeching Mariage...which is the nearest resemblance of our union with Christ." This is the paradisaal view of marriage, in which, as in the Song of Songs, the black bride from the foreign land is brought up into the heavenly palace of the wise king. The ascent of man and the descent of the Word thus conjoin.

Hooker, V, lii, 13.

Several consequences flow from the hypostatic union in Milton's Christ. We need to recall that his Father and Son are not coessential, that the Son is a derivative being, and so a large part of the raison d'être for the exclusion of real and individualized humanity from the Incarnation doesn't exist for him. Since this Incarnation involved one man only, the union of the elect with the resurrected Christ is accomplished by each individual, not by some commonly held substance, "the nature whereof we consist." This direct relationship between each individual and the Word would seem to suggest Milton's antipathy to the visible autonomous Church containing the Word within it, and might suggest something more like the mystical church. Furthermore, such an incarnate Christ, having emptied himself, could "increase in wisdom" (Luke 2:52), that is, become what he already is, as he does so movingly in Paradise Regained, with a real sense of discovery and peril. Having been fully tempted as man, "since he himself suffered with patience when he was tempted, he is able to come to the help of those who are tempted" (Heb. 2:18). Thus, "we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with a feeling of our weaknesses" (Heb. 4:15)...

CD, XIV, 427.

"who is sufficiently able to have compassion on the ignorant and the wayward, because he is himself enclosed in weakness" (Heb. 5:2). Milton's concurrence with this biblical author's derivation of Christ's compassion from his suffering as a man sheds some light on why the tone of the Son's speech in Paradise Lost III is so dry and austere (despite all the "breath'd immortal love" claimed for the speaker), and why Christ in Paradise Regained, but yet begun in his ministry, has that similar astringent quality. Lastly, I would like to suggest that a Christ such as Milton perceives is a mediator in a very complete sense, as he stands in relation to God analogously as man stands in relation to him.

Milton goes to some lengths to show in what sense the Son is equal to the Father in his argument that,

the name attributes, and works of God, and the divine office itself, are habitually attributed to the Son...in such a way that they are easily understood to be attributable, in their primary and proper sense, to the Father alone, and that the Son admits he possesses whatever measure of deity is attributed to him, by virtue of the peculiar gift and kindness of the Father, as the apostles also testify.

CD, V, 223.

Following upon the suggestion of Christ the Mediator as an analogical door between God and Man, two particular places in Milton's lengthy argument, while they are employed to discriminate the Son from the Father, indicate rather strongly the closeness of the relationship between Milton's God the Father, the Son, and man.

When, for example, according to Milton's typological



CD, V, 257.

CD, V, 257.  
PLV, 611-12.

reading of the Old Testament, Christ is clearly called Jehovah, as in Isa. 8:13-14, "we should remember that this is not his own name but the name of Jehovah who is in him." The question is, in what sense are we to understand "in him"? We have already met two metaphors in Heb. 1:1-3, in which the Son appears as the blazing forth of the Father's glory and as the impressed image of his subsistence. The light-bridge is metaphorically identical to Jacob's ladder, which goes both ways, up and down: God "regards the things which the Jews are going to do to his Son as if they were offenses against himself" ("him who disobeyes / Mee disobeyes"), and "In the same way the Son says that what is done to those who believe in him, is done to him," as in Matt. 25:40. Such a connection is only manifest, however, in what is called the "Kingdom of Heaven," or at the Last Judgment, or in the visionary condition which John calls being "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:10). In other words, this connection must be understood metaphorically. As noted before, metaphor as such belongs to the realm of poetry and not properly to theology, but since De Doctrina is so thoroughly interpenetrated with the simple, parabolic language of scripture, Milton's theology constantly appears either on the brink of metaphorical expression or in a struggle to ground the ambiguous words he must use in a restricted sense. Theological language must discriminate, while the metaphor identifies. Thus the theologian nears poetic territory when, in his exegesis of Col. 2:9 ("the whole fulness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily")

in conjunction with Eph. 3:19 ("that you may be filled with all God's fulness"), he writes that "Christ has received his fulness from God just as we shall receive ours from Christ," though he takes his usual pains to establish again the differences involved. In De Doctrina the metaphorical identification of man with Christ, and Christ with the Father, is the mystic union discussed in John 14:20, which quotation heads a dense paragraph of proof-texts: "on that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." The identification of each individual with Christ, considered as a process, is called "COMMUNION," from which arises "THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS," constituting "that mystic body, "THE INVISIBLE CHURCH." Significantly for Milton's conception of the "hypostatic union" of the *θεῶνθρωπος*, the bond of love between Christ and this invisible church is "figured as the love of husband for wife," which would suggest once again that Christ *θεῶνθρωπος* is a microcosm of the apocalyptic marriage, through which "God shall be all in all" in Christ, "reconciling the world to himself" (II Cor. 5:19).

The nature of the office of mediator, Milton says, becomes apparent through the conjunction of Acts 7:38 ("this is he who has received the living words to pass on to us") and Deut. 5:5 ("when I was standing between Jehovah and you to pass the word of Jehovah on to you"), from which comes the image of the Word passing on the Word, that is, the active, symbolically male sense implicit in sermo, at work in the redemptive act of creation, the enlightenment

of darkness. The first or prophetic function of the three-fold mediatorial office has just this emphasis: "TO EDUCATE HIS CHURCH

CD,  $\overline{XV}$ , 432. IN HEAVENLY TRUTH AND TO TEACH THE WHOLE WILL OF HIS FATHER."

This function began "at the very beginning of the world"

PL  $\overline{III}$ , 143ff. (the theological basis for the Son offering himself for fallen man, which parable gives us some idea of the dimensions of the

CD,  $\overline{XV}$ , 433. Miltonic educator) and "will continue...until the end of the

world." The prophetic function has two parts: "one external and one internal. The first is the revelation of divine truth,

CD,  $\overline{XV}$ , 432. the second the illumination of the mind." The former part has taken the external forms of prophecy and the Incarnation and

continues in the external revelatory word of God, all of which forms the central divine activity of creation. The incandescent

CD,  $\overline{XV}$ , 433. internal part is what is meant by "that prophetic spirit of Christ within" (I Pet. 1:11), that which "was the true light,

CD,  $\overline{XV}$ , 432. which gives light to every man who comes into the world" (John 1:9). One aspect of this illuminatory function of the mediator

is specified in Luke 10:22 ("no one knows who the Father is, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal

CD,  $\overline{XV}$ , 432. him"), by which it is possible to understand more thoroughly

than otherwise why the poetic presentation of God in Paradise

Lost should be directly preceded by that masque-like effulgence of "holy Light, offspring of Heav'n first-born," which salutation

modulates into a prayer from a darkened, chaotic, fallen mind

asking to be illuminated and have its mists purged away. In

the Nativity Ode the burning coal of Isaiah is the agent of purification. In both poems the poet becomes an educator-poet-prophet in the highest human sense, though theologically inferior to his archetype, Christ.

CD, XV, 433-4. The priestly function of the mediatorial office Milton places "in the order of Melchisedek" (Ps. 110:4), quoting the argument in Hebrews that links Christ to a order of priesthood superior to the Levitical and their Law. Melchisedek, prototype of Christ, is also the biblical figure in which king and priest are united, as is true for Milton only of Christ. This priest "once offered himself to God the Father as a sacrifice for sinners," that is, as *θεῶν ὁρρωτός*, having "emptied himself" (Philipp. 2:6-7)--a metaphor for the Incarnation, in which the Son took on "the form of a servant." Having in mind what Milton means by the "hypostatic union," we can understand the significance of his emphasis (though it is not sharp, as the union is not a juxtaposition) "that it was especially in his human nature that he offered himself." Here the theologian seems to be guarding against any lingering suspicion that Christ did not suffer as a real man, "in the body of his flesh, through death" (Col. 1:22). A full participation in human life is central to Milton's mediatorial *θεῶν ὁρρωτός*.

What seems most important about the kingly function is that this king legislates through internal law and conquers by spiritual weapons. Christ as king, then, precipitates the internalization

or incarnation of "a free and spiritual law" in the worshipper and the externalization or casting-off of "the law of flesh and of bondage." He commands "not only the body, as a civil magistrate does, but above all he rules the mind and the conscience." The idea of spiritual weapons returns us once again to the image of the quick and piercing Sermo, which both slays and resurrects.

The three aspects of mediation--prophetic, priestly, and kingly--become actualized through Christ's humiliation and his subsequent exaltation. The Incarnation itself, as noted earlier, is a humiliation, the kenosis or emptying of glory and assumption of "the form of a servant." As the poet says in the Nativity Ode, the Son "forsook the Courts of everlasting Day, / And chose with us a darksome house of mortal Clay." The mediatorial humiliation is an agon or suffering and so is equated with Christ's Passion, and here Milton's conception of the derivative Son is most crucial. Thus he comments on Luke 22:43 ("an angel from heaven appeared to him, strengthening him"): "What need would there be of an angel unless both Christ's natures were suffering?" Furthermore, both Christ's natures die. In his discussion of the death of the body, Milton works out what is technically called a doctrine of thnetopsychism (lit. "soul death"), which means that "the whole man dies," including body, spirit, and soul, and that at the appointed hour the whole is resurrected. "Thus even Christ's soul succumbed to death for a short time when he died for our

CD, XVI, 439;  
cp. CD, V, 269-70.

CD, XIII

cp. M. Kelly, 91 ff.

CD, XIII, 400.

CCD, XIII, 405  
CCD, XVI, 439

sins...the grave held him for three days after death." Milton simply could not accept the extra-biblical conception of a soul that parts from its body after death and flies off to a heavenly rest-stop. One can see the strength of Milton's mind in his statement that "Christ, the sacrificial lamb, was totally killed;" Milton's Christ faced what all men face without any heavenly escape clauses, proving thereby a true exemplar, while at the same time his divine aspect allowed him to seek death "in our place and for the sake of redemption," and not merely as an example.

CCD, XVI, 440.

CCD, XVI, 444.

CCD, XVI, 439.

CCD, XXVIII, 550.

Frye, 121.

Both the strength of Milton's dependence on the scriptural text and the integral nature of Christ's total death to the whole of his christology are shown in his attitude towards the apocryphal story of the Harrowing of Hell, "that peevish controversy...which has teased the minds of theologians so much." He had another way of expressing the essential significance of that incident without relying on what he regarded as a questionable source. Since he interpreted baptism as "a symbol for Christ's painful life, his death and his burial, in which he was, so to speak, immersed for a time," and since in the synoptic gospels the temptation in the wilderness follows immediately upon the baptism, Milton made the dialogue with Satan in the wilderness represent the perilous struggle against the whole might of Hell. Given the nature of Milton's Christ, this battle was of no certain outcome.

Earlier we saw that Christ's resurrection from the dead constitutes one of the moments of epiphany contained in that metaphor "today" of Psalm 2, as Paul interprets it in Acts 13:32-3. Now, this metaphorical begetting or exaltation of Christ, "like his emptying of himself, applies to both his natures. It applies to his divine nature by virtue of that nature's restitution and manifestation, and it applies to his human nature by virtue of its accession." Here again the subtlety of Milton's handling of scripture can be observed: through three quotations he presents the resurrection of the divine being, John 17:5 ("now glorify me, Father, with your own self, with the glory which I had with you before the world was"); of the human one, Acts 13:32-3 ("having raised up Jesus, as indeed it is written in the second Psalm, you are my Son, I have begotten you today"); and of the *θεῶν ὁμοιωσις* who is both, Rom. 1:4 ("revealed as [or] defined as the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead"). Milton's dual translation of the Greek *ὁρισθέντος* in the last quotation, from *ὁρίσας* (with reference to a god, "determine to be a god, deify"), reflects the very ambiguity the theologian strives to resolve.

The full meaning of the exaltation of Milton's Christ turns on the kenosis in yet another way. We are told that the purpose of the exaltation was "for our good, by virtue partly of his own merit and partly of the Father's gift;" that is, he worked

for it and earned it, though he would not have got it without God's free grace. Now the whole pattern of Christ's life, Milton insists, reveals that he was "formed like flesh, liable to sin" (Romans 8:3), that he had emptied himself of his glory in being so formed, and that he took on this painful life "especially in his human nature." The possibility of earning his resurrection, therefore, is connected with that aspect of human nature in which "some traces of the divine image still remain...which are not wholly extinguished by this spiritual death." Such an extinction is a lapsarian precondition of corporeal existence which involves the loss of right reason, the extinction of righteousness and liberty, the slavish subjection to sin, and the death of the spiritual life, all of which bondage Christ overthrows from within by discovering his own "traces of the divine image." The fact that Christ in his human aspect shares this freedom with man, however vestigial it may be, to act in the genuine sense, is theologically based on Milton's doctrine of the contingent decrees of God: "we must conclude," he insists at length, "that God made no absolute decrees about anything which he has left in the power of men, for men have freedom of action," though, he soberly admits later, this vestige of freedom "is so weak and of such little moment, that it only takes away any excuse we might have for doing nothing." This operation of human freedom in the process of salvation has been called Milton's Arminianism, a doctrinal tendency named after the Seventeenth Century Dutch



M. Kelly, 74-86. minister James Arminius; it is equally possible, however, to hear directly the echoes of the fifth century debate between Augustine and Pelagius.

There are two aims of the mediatorial ministry: "satisfaction of divine justice on behalf of all men," that is, "fulfilling the law and paying the just price," and "shaping of the faithful in the image of Christ." By paying the price, Milton argues, scripture plainly means the substitution of Christ for man, which proof refutes those "who maintain that Christ sought death... only for our good and in order to set an example," that is, the Socinians and the like, who deny Christ's divinity. Forgetting that this filial divinity is not coessential with the Father's equally denies the substitution by rendering it impossible. Milton never really explains the bloody kernel of this metaphor of the sacrificial victim (perhaps there is no need, since that symbolism is so thoroughly a part of scripture), but a clarification is at least implicit in his conception of the hypostatic union as a microcosm of reconciliation, "made flesh, when time shall be:"

"Christ, sent in the fulness of time," in whom all things are collected together, "both the things in heaven and the things on earth" (Eph. 1:10). Recall now the idea of different rhythms of time implicit in the theology, and the notion of evil as a premature or ill-timed pseudo-act that one gets throughout Milton's work. All genuine action in Milton's sense is metaphorically musical, disciplined and therefore free, moving according to

the "melodious time" mentioned in the Nativity Ode. As the opposed images of the gates of Heaven and Hell suggest, such action takes place in the plenitude or perfection of the right moment. Milton explains his sense of the perfect moment in human history by reference to Eph. 1:10 in conjunction with Gal. 4:4, where Paul concludes his parable of the heir, in the bondage of his own immaturity, liberated at "the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But when the fulness of time was come, God sent forth his Son...that we might receive the adoption of sons." From this perfect moment of the maturity of man and by the grace of God comes what Milton calls "CHRISTIAN LIBERTY." By this somewhat circuitous and extra-theological route, we can perhaps better understand in what sense Milton's *Θεὸν ὁρῶντος* containing all things at the right moment and thus substituted for man, pays the price.

CD, xiv, 417. Since all men carry "some traces of the divine image" and not just the Elect, "Christ was given for the whole world." After considerable emphasis on this point, Milton returns to the theme of the compassionate Christ, John 3:17: "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world" (this is the direct implication of the condemning doctrine of the Elect to which Milton is opposed), "but that the world might be saved through him." The question for this theologian, then, is one of each man's acceptance or rejection of what is freely proffered

if (we may add) he is attuned to the moment of grace when it freely happens.

CCD, XVI, 450. This offering of grace leads us to the second aim of the mediatorial ministry, "TO SHAPE US IN CHRIST'S IMAGE, BOTH CHRIST EMPTIED OF GLORY AND CHRIST EXALTED." Earlier Milton argues with Paul in II Cor. 5:14, "that if one died for all, then surely all were dead," that is, all men died with Christ, from which follows the converse, "then he died for all who were dead, that is, for everyone." Here the image to which the participant is conformed is "Christ emptied of glory," Christ as suffering *Θεὸν ἑρρωπῶτος* whose passion was a death to sin on behalf of all who were spiritually dead, that is, everyone. Thus Milton uses such proof texts as Romans 6:4 ("therefore we are buried [with him by baptism into death]"), and Gal. 2:20 ("crucified together with Christ"). In Milton's vision, Christ *Θεὸν ἑρρωπῶτος*, emptied of glory, is the true nature of man in this life. "So if we are mindful of Christ's satisfaction, and of the fact that we are shaped in the image of Christ emptied of glory, then the restoration of man is a matter of desert." The image for man restored is Christ exalted, by which Milton ultimately means the resurrection from the dead, John 12:32 ("and I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to me").

CD, XVI, 445.

CD, XVI, 450-1.

The reader may recall that the restoration of man in the De Doctrina consists first of the redemption of man by Christ and then his renovation, by which "he is brought to a state of

Do, xvii, 453. grace after being cursed and subject to God's anger." "Renovation takes place either naturally or supernaturally," the natural kind affecting only the natural man and accomplished by God through a calling or vocation to knowledge of how to "walk always in my sight and be perfect" (Gen. 17:1). This calling occurs either generally, to all men, or specially, to certain individuals, and its effect is a partial renewal of the mind and will of the natural man, by which "God gives us the power to act freely, which we have not been able to do since the fall unless called and restored."

CTD, xvii, 457. Supernatural renovation is a process called "REGENERATION and INGRAFTING IN CHRIST." It is the latter of these two forms that I wish to focus attention on as a means of concluding this examination of Milton's Christology. The "ingrafting" has directly to do with the nature of Milton's Christ, whereas regeneration is a Fatherly act, by which the old man (Adam within) is destroyed and the inner man regenerated, "so that his whole mind is restored to the image of God, as if he were a new creature." The mediatorial agency only seems to disappear in this context because Milton is focusing on the immediate act of God by which repentance is triggered and faith implanted, rather than the mediating process of ingrafting onto and pruning the timely vine.

CCD, xviii, 461. The last great image of the relationship between man, Christ, and God in Milton's De Doctrina with which I wish to deal is that of God the Father in the archetypal human occupation of husbandman or farmer, nurturing the wheat and the fruitful boughs,

and rooting out the tares and pruning away the sterile branches: Matt. 15:13, "every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted out;" John 15:1-2, "I am the true vine, my Father is the farmer. Every branch in me which does not bear fruit, he removes." The metaphoric relationship between God and man is a living one, and Christ is the organic connection. Inherent in the Biblical symbolism of the husbandman and the fruitful soil is the sexual metaphor, which in this context brings God the farmer and Christ his vine and man his fruitful bough into so close a bond that the whole image well qualifies to illuminate Milton's conception of the organic chain of spiritual being.

Milton remains within the metaphor: "The effects which this ingrafting produces, when combined with regeneration, are NEW LIFE and GROWTH." This new life (note that it follows upon ingrafting and regeneration) consists in living "to God," which means to live in imitation of Christ, "that the life of Jesus may be made manifest in our body" (II Cor. 4:10). For Milton this imitation is a process of identification with our own true nature, a kind of eucharistic internalization of the historical Christ, as in another of his texts, Gal. 2:20: "[I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but] Christ lives in me." Paul's "not I" implies the death of the self, Col. 3:3 ("[For ye are dead, and] your life is hidden with Christ in God," as Milton notes: "This is also called self-denial."

CD, XI, 477.

CD, XI, 477.

CD, XI, 477.  
NOTE 7.

CD, XI, 478.

This new life "in the spirit" is manifested by a nearly complete restoration of the intellect to its original clarity and power. The internal imitative discipline of this new life brings about an experience analogous to the descent of the creative Word into chaos or into the flesh, involving a purging or dispersal of the darkness of native ignorance and the organization of life energy into the form of a habitus through which the worshipper, instructed by God, comes to know "everything necessary for eternal salvation and for a truly blessed life."

CD, XI, 478.

Just as this "understanding of spiritual affairs" is expressed in the symbolism of the potent light, which the ingrafted branch requires, so the other effect of the new life takes on the symbolic modality of the water of life, or the sap of the vine of life. Thus we are told that Charity is the response of the

CD, XI, 479.

ingrafted branch to "a sense of the divine love which is poured into the hearts of the regenerate through the spirit," and that this charity so affects "those who are implanted...that they become dead to sin and alive again to God, and bring forth

CD, XI, 479.

good works freely." Thus Gal. 5:22: "the fruit of the spirit is charity." The image of the fruitful bough, ingrafted in Christ

CD, XI, 480.

and nurtured by God in the forms of the husbandman, the potent intelligential light, and the water of life structures Milton's theology on the most fundamental level, as the theology is within the mythological framework of the Bible and its intimacy with the language of scripture is as close as Milton could manage.

Along with the state of new life comes the process of growth, the same organic metaphor continuing in the vinedressing Father: John 15:2 ("and every branch which bears fruit he purges, so that it may bring forth more fruit.") God acts, the vine responds. Milton is keen to avoid the implication of a totally passive role for the ingrafted ones, whose "spiritual growth, unlike physical growth, seems to be to some extent within the power of the regenerate themselves." Thus the liberated human will cooperate with the Father's grace to achieve, like the Son, an earned election, through its life according to the vision of charity. "As for perfection, although it is not to be hoped for in this life, we ought nevertheless to struggle and strive towards perfection as our ultimate goal." This asymptotic course or redemptive movement up the chain of being is an evolutionary growth in disciplined freedom, Eph. 4:15: "behaving ourselves sincerely with charity, we may truly grow into him who is the head, Christ." "So from the root," Milton envisions in Paradise Lost, "Springs lighter the green stalk," and as in Eve's paradisaal nursery, where the plants "at her coming sprung / And toucht by her fair tendance gladlier grew," so in the regenerate state man interpenetrates with God.

There is value to wondering why such a visionary conclusion seems so out of place in a theological study. Arthur Barker's question, with which I began the essay, is essentially a sharper form of that puzzlement. One answer is that what animated the formulas of theology for Milton was just this symbolic vision

to which Milton as poet returned. De Doctrina permits only the kernels and thought-seeds, the dry potential of what is permitted and approved by the parables and visions of scripture. Perhaps this sense of De Doctrina containing something far greater than itself that struggles to be free from confines not natural to its origins suggests also the condition of man in "this life" of bondage to Law. Perhaps as Law gives way to its fulfilment in the Gospel, so Milton's Christian doctrine is overthrown by its realization in the poetic vision. Was not Spenser a better teacher than Aquinas?



## Notes

1. All quotations from the Bible are taken as they appear in Carey's translation of De Doctrina or directly from the Latin text, unless otherwise noted. One of the serious disadvantages of Bishop Sumner's translation is that he adopted the text of the Authorized Version instead of rendering the Latin accurately. On the rare occasions when I thought Carey's version flawed, I have translated the passages myself. For an analysis of the Sumner version see John Carey's discussion in Volume VI of the Yale edition.
2. All English quotations are from the Carey translation unless otherwise noted. These are designated by the marginal CD, followed by the chapter reference, followed by the page number in Volume VI of the Yale edition. English quotations not from Carey I have translated; these are designated by the marginal De Doc., followed by the chapter reference, followed by the page number of the Latin text in the appropriate volume of the Columbia edition.
3. The reader should beware of the Sumner translation whenever these terms are involved, since he was inconsistent in his rendering of them into English.
4. MacMullen's portrait of the "Procrustean concord of Nicaea" under the domination of a powerful but anti-intellectual and scripturally illiterate secular prince shows just the kind of domination and perversion of religion by politics that Milton opposed. MacMullen demonstrates that what might have been a meeting of minds (had it been otherwise thought necessary at all) was transformed into a power struggle exacerbated by the weapon of excommunication which Constantine wielded. The insertion of homoeousios into the Creed was Constantine's doing. As for the original Arian position, "What escaped oblivion, memory bent to partisan purposes" (171).
5. Milton could be classed as a "subordinationist," but I think very little is to be gained (and perhaps much to be confused) by applying such crude labels to a very complex statement of belief.
6. This creative purgation seems to me to be at the core of what Milton means by catharsis, which I am tempted to look at through Plato's conception, as, for example, in the Phaedo (67de) and the Phaedrus (279bc).

7. Milton's text reads, "vixit in me Christus," and so Carey translates it as "Christ lived in me." Elsewhere, I think the only other citation of this passage, Milton quotes correctly, "vivit in me Christus" (De Doc., XVI, 332). I cannot find any explanation for Milton's use of the past tense other than to suppose a copyist's error, as the tense change destroys the meaning of Paul's statement.

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I have read this paper with great interest and think it an excellent study of Milton's Christology. I don't know that I have much to say about it, as it has covered the situation at first hand very adequately. It seems to me that the doctrine of the Trinity was the main intellectual instrument by which the Church was enabled to transform the Bible into a mirror of church doctrine. Its convention then became, as Newman said, not to teach doctrine but to prove it. Milton, of course, was trying to shake the Bible loose from all ecclesiastical domination, whether Catholic or Protestant, and so he shows a superficial resemblance to Arian and similar movements. But I think the real thrust of the Christian Doctrine is towards a conception of Christianity in which, as in, for example, Kierkegaard, the personal is primary and the personality of Christ needs to be, so to speak, liberated from the Trinity. However, perhaps that's what your title means, in which case you have already made the point.